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## Only the Bad Die Young: The Correlates of Organizational Death for Far-Right Extremist Groups

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### ABSTRACT

The domestic far-right movement has existed in the United States for many years. During that time, groups have appeared, disappeared, and reappeared. Unfortunately, very little is known about what causes these groups to disband. Prior research has focused on long-lived groups, but the majority of extremist or terrorist groups fail to survive for an extended period of time. This study examined a variety of external and internal correlates of organizational death identified from both terrorism and organizational literature, to empirically test which correlates lead to a group dying young.

### ARTICLE HISTORY

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Most terrorist and extremist groups only operate for short periods of time. Terrorist and extremist groups usually organize, exist, and then die in less than a year.<sup>1</sup> It is interesting that recent scholarly attention has focused on why groups that existed for longer periods of time eventually die, accounting for the contextual and organizational variables that contribute to organizational death.<sup>2</sup> For example, Suttmoeller et al.'s study examined far-right groups that existed for at least three years. They found that a far-right group's use of the Internet, the external political environment, whether they experienced factional splitting and the group's size influenced whether they lived or died.<sup>3</sup> These studies that explain why organizations eventually die are important for understanding the evolution of terrorist and extremist groups, but there is a significant need to understand why so many groups die young. Some studies have included groups that did not persist for an extended period of time,<sup>4</sup> but conclusions regarding why and how they differ from groups that do manage to persist have not been reached. Indeed, no study has focused on the factors contributing to the death of groups existing for short periods of time, or whether these factors are similar or different compared to longer existing groups. This study fills these gaps.

This study focuses on far-right extremist groups. Such groups are important to examine for several reasons.

First, thousands of far-right extremist groups have existed in the United States throughout history. Many of these groups are short-lived, but others such as the Ku Klux Klan have

persisted for decades.<sup>5</sup> Few studies have examined why some domestic far-right groups survive, while other die. Recently, scholars have begun to examine the correlates of organizational death for the domestic far right, but they have only examined groups with longer lives (at least three years). This study will examine groups that have existed for both shorter and longer periods of time. This study addresses a significant gap because most groups within the larger far-right movement only survive for short periods of time.<sup>6</sup>

Second, the domestic far-right has posed a threat to society, as evidenced by the recent shootings of law enforcement officers in Las Vegas<sup>7</sup> and the murders at a Jewish Community Center in Kansas City.<sup>8</sup> In 2014, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) identified 784 extremist groups that were active in the United States.<sup>9</sup> While not all of those groups listed by the SPLC would be considered far-right groups, the United States Extremist Crime Database (ECDB) identified 6,000 active far-right groups in the United States between 1990 and 2008. Even though only a small percentage of those groups commit violent acts, the influence of social movement organizations may extend beyond that particular group's membership, and may influence unaffiliated, but like-minded others to commit acts of deviance or violence.<sup>10</sup> For example, Green and Rich found that cross burnings increased in areas where White supremacist rallies were recently held.<sup>11</sup>

Law enforcement officials in the United States have also identified the far-right as a substantial threat to society.<sup>12</sup> State police agencies viewed far-right extremists as nearly as large a threat to national and state security as *ihadists*. The ECDB corroborated those sentiments by linking 335 homicide incidents to 100 domestic far-right organizations between 1990 and 2010. These homicides resulted in over 560 individuals killed.<sup>13</sup>

Third, this study includes both violent and nonviolent groups. Prior to Suttmoeller et al.,<sup>14</sup> scholars have focused only on violent groups. It is understandable why scholars have focused solely on violent groups. However, nonviolent groups comprise the larger percentage of the far-right movement in the United States as research indicates that at least 80 percent of the groups studied were nonviolent.<sup>15</sup> Simi found that violent far-right extremists were often involved in nonviolent movement activities and groups prior to turning to violence.<sup>16</sup> To gain a fuller understanding of not only the groups that comprise the domestic far-right movement, but also the overall domestic far-right movement, nonviolent groups should be included.

## Literature review

Organizations, just like biological organisms, are born, mature, and die.<sup>17</sup> Even though most organizations die quickly, unlike biological organisms, organizations do not have to die. Roughly 50 percent of businesses in the United States die within the first five years of their existence, and most businesses die within ten years.<sup>18</sup> A large percentage (90 percent) of domestic far-right groups also die quickly.<sup>19</sup> Of those lucky few that do survive past the first year, approximately half of those are believed to have died within ten years.<sup>20</sup> Chermak et al., found an even smaller percentage (~10 percent) survived longer than three years.<sup>21</sup>

## Terrorist group death

A wide variety of reasons for the decline and demise of organizations have been identified and scholars generally agree that both external and internal factors may influence the life

span of an organization.<sup>22</sup> External correlates such as: economics, competition, technology, legal and government restraints, social change, and political vulnerability have all been identified as possible factors in an organizations decline and death.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, internal correlates such as: group age, group size, internal conflict and group ideology have also been identified as possible factors in a group's decline and demise.

### **External causes**

**Economics.** Historically, White supremacist groups exploited economic issues to increase recruitment and to mobilize supporters.<sup>24</sup> Others have examined economics relative to whether an organization was located in an urban, suburban, or rural environment. Urban, suburban, and rural environments differ economically. Urban areas are characterized by larger numbers of white collar occupations, while rural areas have higher numbers of blue collar jobs.<sup>25</sup> It is important to make this distinction between urban and rural environments because Smith and Florida suggested that most extremist groups were located and concentrated in rural environments.<sup>26</sup> Further, the majority of the leaders of domestic right-wing extremist groups are employed in middle and lower middle class occupations.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, Ross reported that urban environments were more conducive to terrorist activities and that more domestic extremist groups were located in urban environments.<sup>28</sup> Because the literature is inconclusive as to whether a rural or urban environment is more conducive to the existence of terrorist and extremist groups, this variable may have increased importance.

The percentage of people living in poverty is another economic variable that could influence group longevity. The percentage of people living in poverty was found to influence the ability of some White supremacist groups to mobilize and organize.<sup>29</sup> Similarly, Florida found that hate groups were concentrated in areas with higher poverty rates.<sup>30</sup> If higher poverty rates increase a group's ability to recruit and mobilize, then it may also have the opposite effect in areas with lower poverty rates.

**Competition.** Competition for resources between groups may also influence a group's longevity. Competition can be operationalized as a measure of density. As organizational density increases, the competition between organizations for resources and recruits intensifies and may lead to higher mortality rates among young groups<sup>31</sup> as well as the elimination of some other organizations in a highly competitive environment.<sup>32</sup> Crenshaw et al. were one of the few to examine organizational density and its impact on terrorist group mortality. They found that a higher organizational density in a given area decreased an organization's chances of survival to a certain point and then increased their chances. They believed it may be due to cooperation between groups.<sup>33</sup> Further, Kaplan found that even though some far-right extremists may maintain several group affiliations, they can only dedicate time and energy to a limited number of organizations, thereby increasing the competition between groups for the time and energy resources of members.<sup>34</sup>

**Technology.** The adoption or rejection of new technology may also influence a group's decline or demise.<sup>35</sup> Existing or established organizations may have difficulty adopting to new technological advances. This difficulty may lead to their decline. During this period of decline, newer and younger organizations that are more able to adopt new technology may outcompete these older, declining organizations.<sup>36</sup> The inability of some organizations to adopt and utilize new and advancing technology may have particular relevance to the

current study. During the study period, the use of computers and the Internet were an important technological advancement.

The Internet can provide important advantages to extremist groups that choose to utilize it. They may use the Internet for fundraising, networking, recruitment, publicity, propaganda, and psychological warfare campaigns, and to gather and share information.<sup>37</sup> Groups that do not utilize the Internet may be at a disadvantage to those that do.

### *Legal and government restraints*

In the organizational literature, legal and government restraints are defined as government intervention and regulation of traditional businesses.<sup>38</sup> Under this definition, all levels of government influence organizations and the types of relationships and transactions in which they may participate.<sup>39</sup> While this type of government intervention may not be directly applicable to extremist groups, the government may constrain extremist groups through the use of police or military intervention, which may lead to the group's death.<sup>40</sup> Jones and Libicki found that 47 percent of groups ended due to military or police involvement.<sup>41</sup> This may have particular relevance to this study because of the focus on domestic groups. These groups are often local and known to the police. Policing may be an effective means of government intervention, especially in the United States.

### *Social change*

Changes in the social environment may also lead to organizational failure.<sup>42</sup> If businesses or organizations do not realize lifestyle or racial and ethnic shifts within society, they may be more prone to failure.<sup>43</sup> The shifts may decrease demand for a particular organizations goods or services, and if these changes are not recognized, the organization may decline or die.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, changes in the social environment may impact the demand for an extremist group's "goods" or "services." This change in demand could impact a far-right group because it may be directly tied to society's tolerance of their existence. Also, because of the racial component of the far-right, differences in societal demographics may also influence these groups.<sup>45</sup>

A social variable that may influence the longevity of domestic far-right extremist groups is the racial heterogeneity of the states in which the group is located. This measure has only been tested once with regards to terrorist or extremist group death or failure,<sup>46</sup> measures of cultural diversity have been used in other studies of the far right.<sup>47</sup> The more racially heterogeneous an area, the more likely that a White supremacist or extremist will encounter a minority who does not adhere to their White supremacist worldview. These encounters can lead White people to believe their place in society is threatened, and may increase their animosity toward minorities if the encounters are unpleasant. Feelings of animosity or of being threatened may increase a racial group's ability to recruit and organize in a particular area, which may impact group longevity.<sup>48</sup>

### *Political vulnerability*

Political stability is important to organizational survival. A stable political environment allows organizations to plan for the future, whereas an unstable political environment does not because organizations are unsure about the future.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, political context may also influence the longevity of social movement organizations and extremist organizations. Unstable political environments may contribute to a group's ability to mobilize.<sup>50</sup>

Electoral instability can be a sign of political instability caused by changes in political alignments. When political alignments shift based on election results, social movements may be encouraged by the changing political environment.<sup>51</sup> The configuration of the political party system may also have an effect on social movement organizations. While Kreisi discussed the left side of the political spectrum, rather than the right, he believed a political party will encourage and attempt to adopt portions of social movement organizations that may benefit them politically, which may lead to increased political support for the organization.<sup>52</sup>

The political environment can be assessed through measures of ideology and representation. The ideology of the state government can have an influence on whether or not White supremacist groups are able to mobilize. This measure was first proposed by Berry and colleagues and was utilized by Gilliard-Matthews.<sup>53</sup> Government ideology is a measure of the political leaders of each state based on roll-call voting scores, congressional election outcomes, the partisan division of the state legislatures, the governor's party and other political assumptions.<sup>54</sup>

The presence and mobilization of White supremacist groups in the United States may also be influenced by political representation. Gilliard-Matthews measured political representation two ways: by presidential election results and by party affiliation of the state's governor. She found that political representation did influence the presence of some groups.<sup>55</sup>

The prior discussion focused on the mobilization and presence of social movement organizations and extremist groups. Oots suggested that the same factors that may lead to the formation of a terrorist group may also lead to its death.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, examining the political context at the state level may influence whether or not a domestic far-right extremist group persists or fails.

### *Internal causes*

Internal causes may also play a role in the longevity of organizations. Internal issues are responsible for more organizational failures (possibly up to 80 percent) than are external factors.<sup>57</sup> Internal causes of organizational death are important to the current study because much of the focus is on extremist groups and their internal dynamics. Specifically, age, size, internal conflict and group ideology are important to understanding the death of extremist groups.

***Organizational age and size.*** The organizational literature has been inconsistent as to whether or not organizational age influences a group's longevity. In his seminal work, Stinchcombe argued that younger organizations failed at a much higher rate than did older organizations. He referred to this as a "liability of newness."<sup>58</sup> He argued that new organizations lack stable relationships between members and are still learning and creating their roles and tasks, and therefore are susceptible to failure.<sup>59</sup>

Whether or not organizational size influences a terrorist organization's mortality has also produced mixed results. Jones and Libicki believed that larger groups may be able to out-compete smaller groups due to their available resources and the greater difficulty of government factionalization.<sup>60</sup> Others believe that large size decreases a group's ability to maintain social cohesion.<sup>61</sup> Further complicating the matter is that group size may simply be the result of persisting for an extended period of time, and not actually related to group longevity.<sup>62</sup>

Even though scholars cannot agree on whether or not a large group size influences a group's longevity, they do agree that a loss of members can lead to the death of a terrorist organization. Terrorist groups may meet their demise through the loss of members due to amnesty,<sup>63</sup> death, imprisonment or disenchantment.<sup>64</sup>

**Instability.** Instability within the organization is another internal characteristic that may influence a group's longevity.<sup>65</sup> They defined instability as a loss of personnel or turnover. Instability could also mean infighting.<sup>66</sup> For purposes of this discussion, in-fighting among members<sup>67</sup> and factional splitting<sup>68</sup> will be combined as a measure of instability.

In-fighting can be the result of competition or disagreements. Infighting due to competition may occur when group members compete against one another for leadership positions.<sup>69</sup> Infighting can also occur due to disagreements about the group's operations, style, assets or the speed with which the group is escalating their activities.<sup>70</sup> Factionalism among large terrorist organizations is common. As groups increase in size, the ability to maintain internal cohesiveness becomes much more difficult. When the amount of dissent within the organization becomes great enough, factionalization, competition, and internal struggles for leadership may occur. When factionalism occurs within the group, the larger group may no longer exist, but rather is broken into smaller groups, which may or may not become functioning terrorist organizations. Competition within the group as well as internal leadership struggles may also cause factionalization, which may lead to the demise of the organization.<sup>71</sup>

### **Group ideology**

Group ideology is another internal characteristic that is thought to influence a group's longevity. Within the larger terrorism literature, groups that adhere to a nationalist or religious ideology seem to last longer than those who do not.<sup>72</sup> Of these, religious groups are thought to persist for longer durations because spiritually based motivations are not easily abandoned.<sup>73</sup> Jones and Libicki in what appears to be one of the only empirical tests of whether or not a group's ideology influences its longevity found that religious groups have greater group longevity than do all other types of groups across each of the four different time periods examined within their study.<sup>74</sup>

Within the far-right movement, several ideological differences exist, as exemplified by the numerous categories presented by the SPLC.<sup>75</sup> These typologies include categories such as Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazis, racist skinheads, Christian Identity, and neo-Confederate. These typologies suffer from over-generalization, while also focusing on distinct organizations and subcultures. Further, these typologies are such that some groups could be included in multiple typologies, while others do not fit nicely into any of the categories and therefore are classified as "other."<sup>76</sup> Other typologies such as that by Baysinger and Kaplan are also problematic.<sup>77</sup>

In an attempt to create more inclusive categories, Berlet and Vysotsky and Vysotsky<sup>78</sup> proposed a broader typological system for White supremacist groups based on Kreisi and colleagues' typology of New Social Movements.<sup>79</sup> This typology is based on ideology and organizational activity. Within this typology, they proposed three broad categories: political, religious, and youth cultural organizations. By creating these broad categories, Berlet and Vysotsky believed that it would encompass all White supremacist groups. Further, because these typologies are broad, it allows for subcategories to be created within each typology,



such as those suggested by Dobratz.<sup>80</sup> Even though these categories were originally developed for White supremacist groups, they may have application to a broader sample of domestic far-right groups because of their breadth and inclusivity.

The groups within the political typology share several key elements and are rooted in neo-fascist or neo-Nazi ideologies. These groups are generally authoritarian and appeal to traditional values in order to develop narrow and discriminatory definitions of nation, race, and citizenship to create an “other” class of enemies. These types of groups also promote a revolutionary ideology against the dominant political structure, in this case the U.S. government.<sup>81</sup> Political groups also participate in activities such as information dissemination, rallies, protests and meetings. These events serve to intimidate and heighten tensions with existing out groups and to increase support by attracting individuals from the community that are sympathetic to the cause. Examples of political groups are: National Alliance, White Aryan Resistance, National Socialist Movement, White Revolution, Volksfront, and National Vanguard<sup>82</sup> and sovereign citizen groups.

Religious groups are not only led by a spiritually driven ideology, but also have members that practice a religion based on those beliefs.<sup>83</sup> White supremacist religions provide adherents with the inspiration for their racial beliefs and for their role in the broader world. While these groups may also participate in activities very similar to political groups, they also participate in religious services, study sacred texts, and have special rituals and ceremonies.<sup>84</sup> Examples of religious sects included within this category are: Christian Identity, Creativity, Odinism, Asatru, and Wotanism.

The final category proposed by Berlet and Vysotsky is youth cultural groups.<sup>85</sup> Youth cultural groups comprise a substantial portion of the White supremacist movement. While these groups may adhere to a broad White supremacist ideology, there is much variation within this segment of the White supremacist movement and include subcategories such as skinheads, black metal, and industrial/noise/apocalyptic folk/gothic.<sup>86</sup>

While correlates of organizational death have not been studied for the domestic far-right based on ideological typologies, it may be an important aspect that deserves examination. Because of the aforementioned problems with most of the presented typologies, the typology presented by Berlet and Vysotsky will be utilized due to its broad nature and exclusivity of the categories.<sup>87</sup>

## Justification for current study

The previous section discussed the current state of the organizational death literature for terrorist and extremist groups. However, most of these studies have focused on transnational terrorist groups that have persisted for an extended period of time. Studying longer lived groups is important, but the majority of terrorist and extremist groups are not long lived.<sup>88</sup> Studying longer-lived organizations in relation to each other helps to determine why some groups persist longer than others, but does not answer the question of why that group persisted for many years, rather than dying young like so many others. Determining why one group dies early and one survives is an important question that needs to be addressed. However, there are a couple of studies that did include short-lived groups and they will be discussed below.

Crenshaw et al., included a large number of short-lived groups in their ecological study of terrorist organizations. They utilized the International Attributes of Terrorism (ITERATE)



dataset that contained longitudinal data on a large number of transnational terrorist organizations. They focused only on external correlates that may influence a terrorist group's longevity. They examined national context attributes, such as: organizational density, population size, percentage of population that is male, political rights, an index of press freedom, the real gross domestic product (GDP) per capita, the government share of real GDP, per capita of military personnel, state repression, internal wars with over 1,000 battle-related deaths and the percentage of the largest ethnic population. They also examined global social context attributes such as: the exposure to the global media, the percentage of international nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and a measure of trade. Finally, they also included a measure of whether or not a group adhered to an ethno-separatist ideology.<sup>89</sup>

They found that some factors such as group density, the presence of foreign press and internal NGOs, the percentage of young males, and adherence to an ethno-separatist ideology all influenced group survival.

Blomberg et al. also included short-lived groups in their study of transnational terrorist organizations. They also utilized the ITERATE database for their sample of transnational terrorist organizations. They included variables such as: whether or not a group perpetrated an attack, total population, real GDP, a measure of democracy, and dummy indicators of societal fractionalization, elevation, country area, tropical area, and access to a coast. They conducted a duration analysis and found that when short-lived groups were included in the model that the longer that a group is alive, the better chance that it has to survive to the following year. They also found that socioeconomic, political, and geographic variables such as real GDP per capita, size of population, and the regional dummies influenced the hazard rate. The amount of violence that organizations participated in was also important in explaining the hazard rate. The more violent attacks that a group participated in increased their chances of survival to the next year. However, their main conclusion regarding short lived groups (one-hit wonders) was that the socioeconomic factors were less important for explaining their duration dependence and that other factors may be influencing those organizations.<sup>90</sup>

Aside from these two studies, no other study has examined short lived groups. A lack of available organizational level terrorist group data in general<sup>91</sup> or a lack of available information on short-lived groups specifically<sup>92</sup> may have contributed to this lack of research. This study will address these data shortcomings.

While both Blomberg et al. and Crenshaw et al.,<sup>93</sup> focused on transnational terrorist organizations, only two studies have been published examining the correlates of organizational death for domestic far-right groups<sup>94</sup>—one study was a qualitative analysis and the other was a quantitative analysis.

The findings of Suttmoeller et al. provided the foundation for the current study. In their study, they examined possible external and internal correlates of organizational death for domestic far-right extremist groups identified from both the larger terrorist/extremist literature and the organizational literature. Their research provided empirical support for some previously identified anecdotal correlates, but did not find empirical support for others.<sup>95</sup>

First, they examined nine external correlates, meaning correlates from the environment that may influence whether a domestic far-right group lived or died. They examined whether a group was located in an urban environment, county poverty rate, county racial heterogeneity, government ideology, presidential election results, group density, loss of outside support,

whether the group utilized the Internet, and whether or not the group was disrupted by police intervention.<sup>96</sup> Two of those correlates significantly influenced organizational death.

The first correlate they found to significantly influence organizational death was the external political environment of the state where they group existed. They found that groups that existed in states whose presidential election results supported Democrat (blue states) or Republican (red states) candidates for president were more likely to die than were those groups who resided in states that varied in their political support (purple states). The second correlate they found to significantly influence the organizational death of domestic far-right groups was if they did not use the Internet. They found that groups that did not have an Internet presence were more likely to die than were groups that did maintain an Internet presence.<sup>97</sup>

They next examined four internal correlates. Whether or not a group suffered factional splitting, group size, group ideology, and whether the group lost members to amnesty, death, imprisonment, or disenchantment were all included in their analysis. Of these, they found that groups that suffered factional splitting and the group's size both significantly influenced the organizational death of domestic far-right groups. They found that groups that experienced factional splitting were more likely to die than were those that did not. Further, large groups (>200 members) were less likely to die than were smaller groups. When the significant external and internal correlates were analyzed, they all remained significant, except for being located in a blue state.<sup>98</sup>

This study provided a strong foundation for the current project. However, because it only examined groups that existed for longer than three years, it failed to analyze those groups that did not survive for an extended period of time. This leaves a large knowledge gap that this study will address.

This study will build on Freilich et al. and Suttmoeller et al. and provide an important contribution to this very limited amount of empirical research regarding short-lived groups.<sup>99</sup> First, unlike the previous studies that focused on transnational terrorist organizations, this study will examine domestic far-right groups in the United States. While it is important to examine the national context within which groups operate, examining a large number of groups that all operate within the same national context could provide new and interesting findings. Second, the previous studies focused only on violent groups. This study will include both violent and nonviolent groups. Nonviolent groups comprise a large percentage of the domestic far-right movement, and should be included to provide a full picture of factors that may influence domestic far-right groups. Finally, this current study will examine both external and internal correlates of organizational death. Previous studies that included short-lived groups only examined external factors. While external factors are important, internal factors are responsible for a large number of organizational failures and should be included to provide a comprehensive analysis of the influences of organizational death.

This study examines the correlates of organizational death for a sample of domestic far-right groups that did not persist for three years and compares those results to those that existed for longer than three years. Examining these groups to determine if they are similarly influenced by external and internal correlates as were the groups that persisted for more than three years will provide a much more thorough understanding of potential correlates of organizational death for domestic far-right extremist groups.

## Methods

The data used for this study come from the ECDB. The ECDB is an open source, relational database that in addition to far-right group data, contains data on violent incidents, financial crimes, plots committed by domestic extremists, and far-right hate groups.<sup>100</sup>

The groups included in the ECDB were identified from the SPLC's annual *Intelligence Report* and *Klanwatch* publications from 1990–2008. All domestic far-right groups that existed during this time frame were included in the original compilation of 6,000 groups. The groups were then separated into two groups—those that survived longer than three years and those that did not. Of the original 6,000 groups, 550 persisted for more than three years. A total of 275 groups that were included in the ECDB were randomly selected from the 550 groups that had persisted for three years or longer.<sup>101</sup> Most of the organizations included in the ECDB consisted of only a single chapter, but some organizations had multiple chapters. In the event that an organization consisted of multiple chapters, an umbrella group was coded. For example, twenty-four chapters of the World Church of the Creator were identified by the SPLC, but only one entry for the World Church of the Creator was created for the ECDB.

To compare groups that persisted for three or more years to those that died prior to persisting for three years, groups that did not persist for three years were randomly sampled ( $N = 135$ ) from the remaining 5,450 groups in the original list compiled for the ECDB. A sample size of 135 was chosen to provide enough variation and power to be able to detect differences between the two sets of groups.

Data for all of the groups was collected according to the ECDB open source search protocol that utilized 26 different search engines such as Google, New Library, Lexis-Nexis, Infotrac, and All the Web to uncover all publicly available information for each group and its members.<sup>102</sup> The initial search consisted of the group's name, but as additional information was found, subsequent searches were conducted until all leads were exhausted. In the event that no information could be found for a particular group, a replacement group was randomly selected from the list through the use of a random number generator, substituted for the original group, and searched according to the open source protocol. Thirty-one groups that were originally selected had to be replaced due to no information being found. Even though these groups were identified as having existed by the SPLC, in order to increase the validity of those included in the study, independent verification of the group's existence was required. In order for a group to be included, evidence of their existence, independent of the SPLC was required. In the event that a group's existence could not be verified, the group was replaced.

## Coding

### *Correlates of organizational death*

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable examined was a dichotomous measure of whether a group died prior to reaching three years of age: group died prior to three years of age (0/1).<sup>103</sup> Whether or not a group died prior to reaching three years of age was determined by either explicit information gleaned from the open sources that provided proof that the group died, or if the group disappeared from the open sources. Once a group no longer

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for continuous external factors.

Variable	All groups combined				More than three year groups				Less than three year groups			
	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Poverty rate	0.036	0.351	0.124	0.050	0.036	0.325	0.124	0.050	0.036	0.351	0.122	0.049
Racial heterogeneity	0.014	0.710	0.335	0.192	0.014	0.710	0.340	0.198	0.017	0.710	0.326	0.179
Government ideology	2.170	94.771	49.471	20.035	2.170	91.080	48.421	19.513	4.500	94.771	51.572	20.955
Group density	0.600*	58.000	16.640	10.887	0.600	58.000	17.208	10.987	1.000	52.000	15.500	10.632

\*In a few cases, the open sources indicated groups persisted in years no groups were recorded by the SPLC, which caused the average group density to fall below 1.

appeared in the open sources, it was considered defunct if it did not appear for five consecutive years. The five year waiting period was consistent with other organizational studies.<sup>104</sup>

### Independent variables

**External variables.** Several external factors were examined for this study. For a summary of how the external variables were operationalized see Appendix 1. Descriptive statistics for these variables are presented in Table 1 and 2. Two economic factors were examined. The first was a dichotomous variable of whether or not the group was located in an urban county.<sup>105</sup> The type of county was determined based on the United States Department of Agriculture's Rural-Urban Continuum Codes. The 1993 code was used for those groups that existed only in the 1990s and the 2003 code was used for those groups that existed after 2000. All groups that were coded as an "urban" group based on the USDA codes was then coded as "1." All other groups were coded as "0." The other economic factor was a continuous measure that captured the percentage of people living in poverty for the county where the group was located. The poverty measure was gathered from the U.S. Census and was available for the years 1990 and 2000. The 1990 measure was used for those groups that occurred only in the 1990s, while the 2000 measure was used for groups that survived after 2000.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics for categorical and dichotomous external factors.

Variable	All groups	More than three years	Less than three years
<b>Urban</b>			
Non-Urban Group	19.6%	19.9%	19.2%
Urban Group	80.4%	80.1%	80.8%
<b>Police Intervention</b>			
No Police Intervention	74.4%	70.2%	82.8%
Police Intervention	25.6%	29.8%	17.2%
<b>Lost Public Support</b>			
No Change in Support Level	97.5%	97.4%	97.8%
Lost Public Support	2.5%	2.6%	2.2%
<b>Presidential Election Results</b>			
Blue State	56.8%	29.5%	56.3%
Red State	43.2%	28.7%	43.7%
Purple State		41.8%	
<b>Use of the Internet</b>			
Used the Internet	42.3%	55.3%	16.3%
Did not Use the Internet	57.7%	44.7%	83.7%

The next external factor was a measure of competition. This measure was a continuous variable that captured the average number of extremist groups that existed within the state where the group of interest was located.<sup>106</sup> The number of groups that existed in each state for each year was compiled from the yearly listing of extremist groups in the SPLC's *Intelligence Report*. The group's use of technology was another external factor included in the study. This variable was a dichotomous measure of whether or not the group utilized the Internet (0/1). This variable was coded based on open sources. The next external factor that was captured was a measure of government and legal restraints. This variable was a dichotomous measure of whether or not police intervention impacted the group (0/1), and was coded from open sources. A measure of social change was the next external factor that was used for this study. This variable was a continuous measure of the percentage of racial heterogeneity for the county where the group was located. This information was also drawn from the U.S. Census data and followed the same coding procedure as the poverty measure.<sup>107</sup>

Finally, political vulnerability was captured through the use of two variables. The first was a continuous measure of state government ideology as measured by Berry et al. and Gilliard-Matthews.<sup>108</sup> This data was gathered from the Richard C. Fording Dataverse and included state government ideology scores from 1960 through 2006. Because the scores are available for every year, the average score for all the years a group existed was utilized. These scores ranged from 0 to 100, with higher scores indicating increased liberalism.<sup>109</sup> Because there is not extreme variation in a state's government ideology from year to year, years 2007 and 2008 were estimated based on the last year (2006) that a measure was available.<sup>110</sup>

The other political measure was a categorical variable that captured the presidential voting history for each state that had an extremist group.<sup>111</sup> This variable was coded as to whether or not the state where the group was located was a blue or red state in presidential elections. Suttmoeller et al. coded groups that survived for three years or longer as either "red," "blue," or "purple." If a group only persisted during the term of one president, it was simply coded as either "red" or "blue." If a group persisted into two or more presidential terms, the variable could have also been coded as a "purple state." A state was classified as "purple" if the voters of that state supported a candidate for president from one political party in one election and a candidate from a different political party in the next election.<sup>112</sup> However, for this analysis, because none of the groups that failed to survive for three years were located in a "purple" state, groups were only coded as to whether or not they were located in "red" or "blue" states. For those that were previously located in "purple" states, groups were recoded as to the results of the most recent presidential election during which they were alive.

The descriptive statistics for the continuous variables is fairly consistent across group samples. Small differences exist, but no extreme values were found that might skew the results for any of the group samples. Within each sample of groups, the Government Ideology measure appears to exhibit quite a bit of variation, which means that groups are distributed in states that are both liberal and conservative. The Group Density measure is fairly interesting. It ranges from an average of approximately one group to 58 groups, with a mean of roughly 16 for each sample of groups. This shows that group densities vary quite a bit from state to state. Some states do not have much of a far-right presence and some states have a fairly extensive far-right presence. However, on average, groups are located in states with approximately 16 groups.

The descriptive statistics for all three sets of groups are fairly consistent. However, two variables do exhibit some variation. A lack of police intervention is higher for the groups that did not persist for three years than for the groups that persisted for more than three years and all the groups. This may be due to these groups not persisting for very long. In order to come to the attention of law enforcement, groups must participate in some type of event that would alert law enforcement to their presence. These groups may not have simply had the organizational capacity to participate in these types of events.<sup>113</sup> Further, if a group does attract law enforcement attention, they must also do something illegal that would warrant a police response. Most of these groups probably did not exist long enough to attract law enforcement attention.

The second variable that exhibited quite a bit of variation is the use of the Internet by groups that did not persist for three years. Since these groups did not persist for very long, they may have either not had an Internet presence, or may have had a short-lived Internet presence that was not captured in the open sources. This is interesting because it would seem that establishing a Web presence, would be a fairly easy step to take, especially with the potential recruiting and fundraising benefits a Web presence would make possible.<sup>114</sup>

The variable that measured whether or not a group lost public support did not exhibit much variation. It was difficult to capture this variable, and was subsequently dropped from analyses.

**Internal variables.** Like external factors, internal factors may also play a role in the death of a right-wing extremist group. For a summary of how the internal factors are operationalized see Appendix 2. Descriptive statistics for these variables are presented in Table 3. The first internal variable was a dichotomous measure that captured whether or not the organization suffered from factional splitting.<sup>115</sup> The second internal factor that was included in this study was group ideology. This variable utilized Berlet and Vysotsky's categorical measure and captured whether a group was (1) political, (2) religious, or (3) youth cultural.<sup>116</sup> When this variable was included in the analysis, each category was dummy coded. The final internal variable captured whether or not the group suffered personnel losses (other than leaders) due to amnesty, death, imprisonment or disenchantment.<sup>117</sup> This was a dichotomous variable (0/1). All of the above internal variables were coded from open sources.

Political ideology exhibited a fair amount of variation among the sets of groups. The sample of groups that did not persist for three years had a higher percentage of groups that adhered to a youth cultural ideology. This was expected. Groups that adhere to this type of ideology are often skinhead groups.<sup>118</sup> Skinhead groups are notoriously volatile and short-lived groups, and because of their volatility, skinhead groups appear and disappear with some frequency.<sup>119</sup> Further, the sample of groups that did not persist for three years

**Table 3.** Descriptive statistics for internal factors.

Variable	All groups	More than three years	Less than three years
<b>Factional Splitting</b>			
Factional Splitting	8.6%	10.3%	5.5%
No Factional Splitting	91.4%	89.7%	94.5%
<b>Group Ideology</b>			
Political Group	50.7%	53.5%	45.1%
Religious Group	16.0%	19.0%	9.8%
Youth Cultural Group	33.3%	27.5%	45.1%
<b>Lost Group Members</b>			
Did not Lose Group Members	85.1%	82.6%	89.6%
Lost Group Members	14.9%	17.4%	10.4%



also had a lower percentage of religious groups. This also was expected. Jones and Libicki found that religious groups generally survived longer than other types of groups due to the dedication of followers.<sup>120</sup> If members are dedicated to a group and its religious ideology, these groups may tend to not die as quickly as others.

*Results of external and internal factors for all groups.*

*External factors.* This model examined the relationship between the external factors and whether or not a group failed to survive for three years. The following external factors were included in this analysis: whether a group occurred in an urban environment; county poverty rate, county racial heterogeneity, government ideology, whether a group resided in a blue state, group density, loss of outside support, whether the group utilized the Internet and whether or not a group had a police intervention. Two of these factors were significant: use of the Internet and police intervention. The overall Chi-Square model was significant (72.196) at the .001 level of significance. The model also produced a Nagelkerke R-Squared of .235.<sup>121</sup> Full model results are presented in Table 4.

A group’s use of the Internet significantly impacted whether or not they died prior to their third birthday. Groups that did not utilize the Internet were more likely to die prior to existing for three years than were those groups that utilized the Internet. This finding supports prior research that showed that the Internet allowed domestic far-right extremist groups to more effectively fundraise, recruit, and share information than those groups that did not.<sup>122</sup> Being able to raise money and recruit new members more effectively should help a group survive.

The second significant variable was whether or not a group experienced a police intervention. While this variable was significant, it was not in the direction that was expected. Groups that experienced police intervention were more likely to survive past their second year of existence. At first glance, this result seems counterintuitive. One would hypothesize that police intervention would be a significant reason why a group would fail to survive for very

**Table 4.** External, internal, and significant factors and dying prior to three years.

Variable	External			Internal <sup>c</sup>			All significant		
	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)	B	Sig.	Exp(B)
Urban	0.073	0.845	1.076						
Poverty Rate	−0.291	0.917	0.747						
Racial Heterogeneity	−0.080	0.923	0.923						
Government Ideology	0.006	0.312	1.006						
Group Density	−0.004	0.725	0.996						
Police Intervention	−0.925	.002**	0.397				−1.577	.001***	0.207
Lost Public Support	−0.225	0.774	0.798						
Blue State <sup>a</sup>	−0.253	0.326	0.777						
Did not use Internet	1.942	.000***	6.976				1.899	.000***	6.676
Factional Splitting				−0.486	0.290	0.615			
Political Ideology <sup>b</sup>				−1.015	.000***	0.362	−0.767	.016**	0.464
Religious Ideology <sup>b</sup>				−1.495	.000***	0.224	−1.351	.003**	0.259
Lost Group Members				−1.132	.003**	0.322	0.161	0.775	1.714
Constant	−1.841	.002**	0.159	0.279	0.196	1.322	−0.715	0.305	0.489
Chi-Square	72.196	.000***		28.421	.000***		91.891	.000***	
Nagelkerke R-Squared	0.235			0.103			0.315		

<sup>a</sup>Only blue and red states included—no groups existed in purple states

<sup>b</sup>Youth Cultural Ideology as reference group

<sup>c</sup>Group size not included due to a lack of variation

\*\* $p < .05$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$



long. However, to increase the chances of a group to coming to the attention of the police, they must do something noteworthy that would attract the attention of law enforcement. If groups do not survive very long, they very well may not have had time to conduct enough events or activities that would attract the attention of law enforcement. Events could encompass a variety of activities, from rallies, public meetings or concerts to some type of illegal activity. Conversely, a group that has survived for three years or longer would potentially be more organized, have more members and be able to conduct more activities that would draw attention to themselves from law enforcement. Another explanation is that police intervention could galvanize these groups. A common component of the far-right ideology is antigovernment and antipolice sentiments.<sup>123</sup> These groups may be disrupted by police intervention, but instead of causing them to disband, it may instead solidify their resolve against a perceived enemy. This may be particularly important for young groups to increase group cohesion and/or their legitimacy. This is not to say that law enforcement intervention cannot cause the death of a short-lived organization. These results simply suggest that something other than law enforcement intervention more commonly dealt a death blow to organizations prior to occurring for three years.

This finding also contradicts Jones and Libicki that found that police intervention was effective at ending terrorist groups. However, it is important to note that Jones and Libicki focused on violent, transnational terrorist groups.<sup>124</sup> Police strategies to combat a violent, transnational terrorist group may be quite different than a homicide investigation involving a few members of a domestic far-right extremist group. This distinction between the types of groups must be taken into consideration when interpreting this result. None of the other external factors were found to significantly impact whether or not groups survive to their third birthday.

*Internal factors.* The second model tested internal factors to determine their relationship to whether or not a group dissolves prior to surviving for three years. The following variables were included in this model: factional splitting, group ideology, and whether the group lost members. The overall Chi-Square model (28.421) was significant at the .001 level of significance. The model also provided a Nagelkerke R-Squared of .103. The full results from this analysis are included in [Table 4](#).

The first variable that was significant was group ideology. Groups that adhered to a political or religious group ideology were significantly less likely to die prior to surviving three years when compared to groups that adhered to a youth cultural group ideology. While Berlet and Vysotsky identified several subcultures within the youth cultural ideology, a major component of groups that adhere to this type of ideology are skinhead groups. Skinheads are notoriously volatile and therefore are often short-lived.<sup>125</sup> These results support prior literature that these types of groups generally do not persist for extended periods of time.<sup>126</sup> This finding also supports previous research that suggested that those groups that adhered to a religious ideology may be more likely to persist because spiritually based motivations are not easily abandoned.<sup>127</sup> While this finding does support this notion, it does not suggest that religious groups would be the longest lived organizations. This finding only suggests that religious and political groups have a lower chance of dying prior to three years than do groups that adhere to a youth cultural ideology.

The other variable that significantly impacted whether or not a group perished prior to its third birthday was if they lost group members to amnesty, death, imprisonment, or

disenchantment. However, this variable was negatively related to a group dying prior to existing for three years. This result contradicts research that suggested that losing members in this fashion was detrimental to an organization's survival.<sup>128</sup> However, it is important to note that previous studies generally included only older, larger groups, and did not include groups that existed for only a short time. Similar to the discussion on police intervention, the most plausible explanation for this is that in general groups simply did not survive long enough to have members die, be imprisoned or become disenchanting with the group or movement. Because of this, the fact that this variable was negatively related to a group dying in two years or less should be interpreted with some caution.

*Significant factors.* As previously discussed, both external and internal factors could contribute to a group's demise at the same time.<sup>129</sup> Because external and internal factors may impact the group simultaneously, all previous statistically significant internal and external factors were combined into this model. Full model results are presented in Table 4. The overall Chi-Square model (91.891) was significant at the .001 level of significance. The model also produced a Nagelkerke R-Squared of .315. Whether or not a group suffered a police intervention, whether they used the Internet, and whether or not they adhered to a political or religious ideology all remained significant in this model.

## Discussion

This study examined a large number of groups and compared those who survived an extended amount of time to those who did not. We found that police intervention, a group's use of the Internet and their ideology all contributed to whether or not a group lived or died. The findings concerning police intervention and use of the Internet are particularly interesting due to their discussion in previous research and also for their implications.

Similar to Suttmoeller et al., whether or not a domestic far-right extremist group utilized the Internet was an important variable in determining whether a group survived to their third year.<sup>130</sup> Creating an Internet presence seems to be a fairly easy step to take when establishing a new group because of the potential benefits that an Internet presence can provide a group.<sup>131</sup> Aside from the obvious benefits an online presence would provide for groups, it is possible that the use of the Internet may be a proxy for some other group characteristic. For example, if a group takes the time to establish a formal and attractive online presence, does that show an increased level of group cohesion and commitment? This question cannot be answered by the present study, as this study has barely scratched the surface in determining the importance of an online presence for these groups. As the reach of the Internet continues to widen and the use of social media increases, determining how groups are using the Internet will become increasingly important.

The other interesting finding was the impact of police intervention on groups. The influence of police intervention was negatively related to a group surviving to their third birthday, which means that groups that survived less than three years were not likely to die due to police intervention. It is important to note that this finding does not mean that police intervention cannot cause a group to fail, it just suggests that other factors may be more important in determining whether a group fails to survive to year three. Further, police intervention may be important in some cases, such as when group members commit a violent act, but this study suggests that most groups will fail on their own, without any help from the police.

This study, along with Suttmoeller et al. should serve as a starting point for a deeper evaluation of the causes of organizational death of extremist groups.<sup>132</sup> Much more research is needed. This area of research is only beginning to be explored. Our study included both violent and nonviolent groups, and provides some insights into whether certain general group and environmental characteristics influence group longevity, but do different more specific group characteristics play a bigger role in determining group life and death. For example, does participating in violent activities impact a group's longevity? No one has explored that for the far-right. Another area that may prove important for future research concerns group ideology. We found that groups that adhere to a political or religious ideology outlived those with a youth cultural ideology. A further exploration of how group ideology impacts group longevity for domestic far-right groups is also warranted. Another area that should be explored may examine individual reasons why people join or stay in groups. Social Identity Theory may prove useful in this line of research.

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## Appendix 1

### External correlates

Broad correlate	External correlates	
	Specific correlate	Operationalization
Economic	Urban/Rural Economics	1. Not Urban 2. Urban
Economic Competition	Poverty Rate Group Density	Percentage of the population living in poverty Total number of domestic far-right groups located within the state.
Technology	Use of Internet	1. Utilizes the Internet 2. Does not utilize the Internet
Legal and Government Constraints	Police Intervention	1. Police have not intervened 2. Police have intervened
Social Change	Loss of Support	1. Did not suffer a loss of support 2. Suffered a loss of support
Social Change Political Vulnerability Political Vulnerability	Racial Heterogeneity Government Ideology Presidential Electoral Divide	Percentage of racial diversity Calculated measure of government ideology 1. Blue state (Democrat) 2. Red State (Republican)

## Appendix 2

### Internal correlates

Internal correlates Broad correlate	Specific correlate	
	Specific correlate	Reference
Instability	Factional Splitting	1. Did not suffer factional splitting 2. Suffered factional splitting
	Group Ideology	1. Political Group 2. Religious Group 3. Youth Cultural Group
	Loss of Group Members due to Amnesty, Death, Imprisonment or Disenchantment	1. Did not lose group members 2. Lost group members